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The Role of Informal Clubs in Youth Development: A South African Case Study

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ABSTRACT

In the current debate on the future of South African youth, opposing viewpoints advocate "positive" programmes to remedy the problem of youth alienation. This paper addresses the youth question from the viewpoint of pro-social youth clubs in the development process. The authors contend that pro-social youth clubs fulfil a bridging function by providing positive reference groups for young people as they mature. At the individual level of analysis, the paper explores the motivations to participate in youth club activities, the process of forming new clubs or joining existing ones, and how participation is sustained. A sample survey of motivations to participate in club life was conducted among 600 black youth in the Durban Functional Region in 1993. Club life was observed among 42 informal clubs participating in a youth development initiative over a five-year period. A tracer study of the 42 youth clubs, involved mainly in the performing arts, sports, church-related and community service activities, examined the turnover of membership in clubs. The study found that young people are particularly attracted to clubs which further their skills and talents and personal development. Group cohesion acted as an attractive force to join informal clubs. Non-participants in youth clubs wished to remain "uninvolved". The tracer study indicated that youth gravitate to strong and cohesive groups. Strong groups were characterised by public recognition of success in their chosen field of activity; cohesive groups by a spirit of respect and tolerance toward peers. The paper discusses a youth initiative, the Youth Centre Project (YCP), to build strong youth clubs in the Durban region. It is concluded that informal clubs, owing to their capacity to adapt to the changing needs of youth, make an important contribution to the integration of young people into democratic society in South Africa.

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Introduction

The youth is currently the focus of much public debate and concern in South Africa (Everatt & Orkin, 1993; Everatt & Sisulu, 1992; Møller, 1991; Seekings, 1993; Straker, 1992, among others). A recent inquiry into the state of the country’s youth found that large proportions were alienated or at risk of alienation from society (Everatt & Orkin, 1993). The marginalisation of the youth from mainstream society is attributed to South Africa’s recent history of oppression and violence. It is conceded that youth may have borne the brunt of mass mobilisation to achieve freedom and democracy in South African society. Commencing with the Soweto uprising of school children in 1976, black youth played a major role in popular protest movements and the campaign to make the townships ungovernable (Kane-Berman, 1978; 1993). Many youth left South Africa during the 1980s to train in guerrilla warfare in aid of the liberation cause.

The political and social turmoil of the past two decades has taken its toll. The socialisation of youth into adult society has suffered from the disruption of community and family life, and schooling. A tracer study of Soweto school-leavers conducted in 1988 found that 41 and 57 percent of males and females, respectively, were still without jobs after five years of job search (Bennell, 1992:11). The inquiry into the state of the South African youth referred to above found that 43% of young persons were “at risk”, 27% “marginalised” and 5% “lost” in terms of twelve areas of concern ranging from abuse and violence to intergenerational relations and outlook on the future (Everatt & Orkin, 1993:34).

The political convictions of youth in revolt in the 1980s afforded a strong sense of purpose among young people. In the 1990s the firm direction provided by the political aspirations of the previous era has been diluted as the government and the opposition groups negotiate the transition to multiparty democracy. A particular cause for concern in a society intent on forging a future in democracy and peaceful coexistence of people of diverse cultural and social origins is the brutalisation of the youth (Bundy, 1992).

A nationwide inquiry into leisure activities of township youth in the late 1980s found that nearly one in three were members of a youth club (Mthembu & Møller, 1991:29). It is the contention of this paper that informal youth clubs operating during the emergency period in the 1980s provided positive direction for youth who had suffered from disruptions in their education and exclusion from the job market. Furthermore, it is predicted that youth clubs will continue to play an important role in the period of transition to democracy in South Africa. These propositions are in line with current support for positive interventions to address the youth question.

Chisholm (1993) in her historical review of employment policy options since 1976 notes that both the state and parties outside of the state currently agree on the need for “positive” youth programmes to address the question of unemployment
among school-leavers. The Everatt and Orkin inquiry referred to above found that one quarter of youth were "fine". Reference was made to the fact that large proportions of South African youth from all walks of life were engaged in structures such as sports, church and youth groups. Everatt and Orkin (1993:34) anticipate that the role of socialising "fine" youth and rehabilitating youth at risk of alienation will fall mainly to youth structures already in place such as youth clubs. They recommend that "fine" youth be identified so that they can be trained in peer education and leadership courses.

This paper addresses the question of how youth are attracted to "positive" youth clubs and programmes. It reports on a study of the motivations and aspirations of youth club members in the Durban Functional Region (DFR) to participate in youth club activities. An analysis is made in greater depth of the dynamics operating in informal youth clubs in the region. These youth clubs are loosely affiliated to a youth development programme, the Youth Centre Project (YCP), which provides peer education for democracy and leadership training. The youth participating in the informal youth clubs are presumed to be "fine" according to the Everatt and Orkin definition. The present study specifically sought to answer three related questions concerning youth clubs:

- Why do some youth join youth clubs and others not?
- What are the perceived advantages and disadvantages associated with youth club membership?; and
- How is membership adopted and sustained?

An attempt to answer these questions was made by exploring the profiles of YCP youth clubs and the process of group formation and dissolution. At the individual level the focus was on the attraction of clubs for potential members, individual motivations to participate in club activities and the process of gaining access to clubs.

Theoretical Considerations

**Participation in Youth Clubs**

Youth club activities belong in the domain of leisure: Being free of many of the social constraints and commitments of other spheres of life such as work, school and domesticity, leisure is thought to provide unique opportunities for personal development. Participation in youth club and YCP activities was examined within the framework of leisure studies.

Activities and their settings are the main focus of leisure studies. Conventional theories describe a simple motivation sequence which leads to participation in leisure activities. A particular interest or propensity is seen to activate participation in a corresponding leisure activity. Constraints or barriers typically intervene
between interests being fulfilled through a suitable leisure outlet. More recently leisure theorists have argued that constraints can operate earlier in the sequence and prevent certain interests from developing in the first place. Examples of antecedent barriers include kin and non-kin reference group attitudes, gender socialisation into specific leisure activities, and overt or covert class and race discrimination, all of which may dictate the appropriateness and availability of various leisure activities (Jackson, 1988; Henderson, 1993). In the South African setting race discrimination and the underdevelopment of recreation facilities for blacks may have stunted the growth of leisure interests of black youth in the townships, and particularly in the shack areas.

A new thrust in leisure studies inquires into the nature of subjective constraints and the personal processes involved in overcoming constraints (Jackson, 1988; Samdahl, 1988; Shaw, 1985; Mannell & Zuzanek, 1991). Proponents of this viewpoint assert that a better understanding of constraints may be afforded by classification and description of non-participants and their reasons for not participating (Jackson, 1988:204; Jackson, 1990; Crawford and Godbey, 1987). Following this line of thought the reported study inquired into both reasons for participation and non-participation in youth clubs.

The subjective experience of joining an interest group, such as a youth club, is the focus of the theoretical model devised by Brandenburg et al (1982). The model postulates that activity adoption occurs when four conditions are present: opportunity to engage in the activity, some knowledge of the activity, a favourable social milieu, and receptiveness, i.e. willingness or desire to try a new experience. One or more key events in the lives of individuals, which have a bearing on the four conditions, are instrumental in determining that the activity is actually taken up. Key events may be deliberately induced or occur accidentally. Key events also serve to heighten anticipation that the activity will be a satisfying experience. The dynamics of activity adoption are revealed through the subjects’ own perceptions and descriptions of their processes of change.

The Bridging Function of Youth Clubs
A supposition put forward in this paper is that informal youth clubs have emerged to fill the leisure vacuum for black youth. Although youth clubs may have been born of leisure constraints applied during the apartheid era, they provide unique opportunities for youth development appropriate for a more democratic society. Kleiber; Larson & Csikszentmihalyi (1986) attribute a major bridging function to “transitional” leisure activities which present challenges and demands in adolescence similar to those of adult life. According to this viewpoint, youth clubs, by involving youth in challenging “transitional” leisure activities, lay the groundwork for experiencing satisfaction in more obligatory adult activities. The literature on
leisure emphasises the important role of youth centres and clubs in providing direction for youth whose lives are not structured through school or employment. In Britain, Hendry; Raymond & Stewart (1984) found that unemployed youth tended to spend more time at youth centres and were more likely than others to maintain their attendance record.

The youth group experience can be psychologically meaningful for youth at risk. There may be a strong affinity between the informal “conformist” youth clubs that are the focus of this inquiry, and the gangs of delinquents and criminal youth whose activities have increased dramatically during the transition period which commenced in early 1990. Both “delinquent” and “respectable” groups provide identity and direction (Brake, 1985:23; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1975:96; Mthembu & Møller, 1991:34). Whereas the criminal gang assists youth to work through developmental issues in an anti-social fashion, the youth clubs under examination in this paper advocate pro-social activities for youth.

Youth clubs may also assist in reducing teenage pregnancy, a major social problem in South African society (Burman & Preston-Whyte, 1992). As is detailed below, youth club activities and the YCP education programme included many of the elements of innovative teenage pregnancy prevention programmes which proved effective among disadvantaged youth in the United States, such as life skills, self-esteem building, and community service (Ladner, 1987)

Method

The research drew on a variety of data sources on youth using different methods of observation. Two sources, namely, the YCP database, and the Durban Functional Region (DFR) database are described in the following section. Further sources include a 1989 sample survey of the leisure expectations and aspirations among township youth referred to earlier (Møller, 1992) and unpublished material from an in-depth study of leisure conducted by the third author in two shack areas in the DFR.

History of the Youth Centre Project

The YCP database is of an ethnographic nature and consists of materials collected for a university-based research and development programme on the leisure occupations of urban black youth. The database reflects the history of the YCP project (Møller, 1991). The authors of this paper were members of the research team directing the project during its three year lifespan from 1988 to 1991. Thereafter, the development thrust of the university youth research programme continued as a youth initiative which became known as YCP, short for youth centre project. Documents which make up the YCP database include information on
youth clubs participating in the programme collected by members of the original research team, records of meetings of the youth committee which formed to run the youth development programme, and evaluations of joint club events. Further insights were gained from participant observation by the second author, a trained community worker, who later assumed a coordinating role in the youth initiative.

During the first round of research, informal youth clubs operating in Durban townships and shack settlements were contacted by the community worker on the research team. Information on the structure and activities of the clubs were obtained from a youth club leader or spokesperson. Forty-two clubs were canvassed in this manner during 1988 and 1989. Representatives of the clubs were invited to participate in a workshop in late 1989 to identify the needs and problems encountered by members of their clubs. A steering committee, the YCP Working Group, was formed to carry out recommendations put forward by the youth participating in the workshop (Mthembu & Møller, 1991).

The youth initiative which emerged from the 1989 youth club workshop proved to be a lasting one which extended beyond the official end of the university project in 1991. The first YCP committee was composed of the conveners and facilitators of the workshop and some delegates from the youth clubs. In time the YCP committee became more representative of the groups it aimed to serve by including delegates and alternates from all affiliated groups. However, a small executive effectively ran the operations. The author in charge of the development thrust of the university research programme was co-opted as the “senior” member on the committee (Mthembu & Møller, 1991:41 “The story of YCP”).

Over the next few years the YCP committee organised regular events for the clubs affiliated to the project. Events included leadership and social skills training. Affiliation to the YCP programme was loose. Typically, prospective clubs were interviewed by the senior member of the YCP committee to obtain a record of the club’s history, structure and activities. Thereafter clubs were informed of YCP events and encouraged to participate regularly. No membership fees were involved and participation in events, which were heavily subsidised by sponsors, were for the most part free. No official records of membership were kept.

Events organised by the YCP committee were designed to build strong youth clubs. Typical YCP events included an annual talent day in which groups performed publicly and competed against each other for trophies; seminars and workshops to improve leadership and life skills, management and fundraising skills, and to discuss youth issues. YCP committee members visited member clubs to review current needs and problems and to assist clubs to put into practice lessons learnt at common YCP events.

In order to promote more effective group functioning and group cohesion the YCP programme encouraged clubs to elect a committee to manage their funds. The YCP committee organised workshops on fundraising methods and introduced
gospel groups to a Durban City Council project aimed at promoting local talent. Each Wednesday, a gospel group was invited to sing from the steps of the Durban City Hall to city workers during their lunch break. The performing groups received an honorarium which more than covered their expenses.

Since its inception in early 1990, the YCP committee acted as a loose umbrella body for member clubs and provided a support function. During 1990 and 1991, the committee benefited from funds allocated to the university research programme on youth. Thereafter, the committee drew funds for its activities from the same sponsor through a community project which was also operating from the university. As the second funding cycle for the sister project was due to be withdrawn at the time of writing in late 1993, the YCP committee was seeking alternative sponsorship for its education programme. Apart from the senior member, who drew a salary as a community organiser, the members of the YCP committee received no compensation for their youth club work.

**YCP database**

- **Club profiles**
  Data to compile profiles of the clubs affiliated to the YCP project was collected at three different stages: At the commencement of the research project in 1988/89 (Time 1 (T1)), towards the official end of the research project in 1990/91 (Time 2 (T2)), and again in 1993 (Time 3 (T3)) when YCP was operating as a youth initiative. At Time 1, information on organisational details was collected for 42 clubs. At Time 3, some 20 clubs were affiliated to the YCP programme. Fifteen of these clubs completed a self-administered questionnaire on organisational details. Twelve of the 15 participants in the survey at Time 3 had also participated in the first round of research.

- **Tracer study**
  At Times 2 and 3 the researchers sought to trace the clubs which had been affiliated to the YCP programme when it was launched. Focus of inquiry and data collection methods varied at each stage of the research. The first two rounds of research were concerned about the formation of informal clubs and how their operations were sustained over time. The third round of research focused more on individual motivations, the process of gaining membership for individuals and perceived constraints.

  In the first and second round of research, information was recorded by the second author who later became the co-ordinator of the YCP programme. In the third round of research the clubs themselves completed a standard questionnaire drawn up by the authors in consultation with YCP committee members. At Time 3, youth club members also participated in three research sessions to discuss motivations for gaining membership and the benefits attached to youth club mem-
bership. The group interviews were conducted by one of the authors, and the sessions were facilitated by members of the YCP committee. In a round-robin, founding club members described how their club had formed while the ordinary club members detailed how they had joined existing clubs. In the course of one of the group sessions the youth were given the task of interviewing each other concerning the particular attractions of club life ("what do you like very much about your club?") and their club identity ("what makes you feel proud about your club?"). In one of the discussion sessions YCP youth were asked whether club life interfered with their homework. The written protocols from the three group discussions and the self-administered questionnaires served as T3 research evidence.

- Durban Functional Region youth database
The DFR database consisted of a multipurpose sample survey of 600 black (African) youth living in the Durban Functional Region (DFR). The survey was conducted in early 1993 by the Human Sciences Research Council’s Durban branch on behalf of a consortium of academic researchers participating in a nationwide inquiry into the situation of youth. The sample was composed of young men (44%) and women (56%) aged 16 to 20 years of age resident in formal township housing areas and shack settlements. Two items put to survey participants explored club membership and the advantages and disadvantages of belonging to a youth club. Club members were questioned about their personal reasons ("likes" and "advantages") for participation. Non-members were questioned about their reasons for non-participation in terms of disadvantages and dislikes. In both cases spontaneous answers were fitted to fixed categories. Categories were developed from earlier research on the leisure habits of township youth (Møller, 1992).

The following examination draws from both data sources described above to explore the attractions of youth clubs and their role in promoting personal development of members and peer education appropriate for integrating youth into democratic society.

Results

Motivations to participate in youth club activities
Survey results indicated that approximately 70% of DFR youth were members of clubs, slightly more male than female. Club affiliation for survey purposes included membership in youth clubs, including church groups and womens’ groups (40%), sports clubs (33%), political organisations and movements (17%), savings and burial clubs (17%), and street committees (2%) (1). Male membership was higher in sports (44%) than youth clubs (30%). Female membership was higher in the youth (49%) than the sports clubs (26%). These findings are consistent with ones obtained in the survey of leisure occupations among township youth.
(Møller, 1992) which recorded that approximately one in two Durban respondents were members of clubs and associations in the wider sense and one in three participated in more narrowly defined youth clubs (Møller, 1992). The study of youth in the shack areas referred to earlier confirmed the gender divide between sports groups and gospel and church groups.

Club members in the Durban Functional Region stated their personal motivations for belonging to a club. Table 1 shows that dominant reasons for belonging to a club referred to personal development, release from boredom, and sociability. Clubs offered opportunities for developing skills and talents. They kept youth out of trouble and prevented boredom. Clubs helped youth to develop friendships and promoted feelings of belonging. Other incentives to participate in club activities included experience of safety in a group, confidence building and self-knowledge, and family approval of club activities. More male and sports club members than other persons emphasised the need to be occupied to keep out of trouble (cf Table 1). The leisure study referred to above confirmed that youth club members were more likely than non-members to see their weekday schedule of activities as worthwhile and to express a sense of well-being with their lives as a whole.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of advantage (*)</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Youth Club</th>
<th>Sports Club</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop skills, talents</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevents boredom, keep out of trouble</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build friendships</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of belonging</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety factor</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build self-confidence</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family approval</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain self-knowledge</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td><strong>424</strong></td>
<td><strong>241</strong></td>
<td><strong>201</strong></td>
<td><strong>195</strong></td>
<td><strong>229</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*) Respondents gave multiple reasons. Spontaneous responses were fitted to given categories.
The group discussions with YCP clubs threw up essentially the same motivators as had emerged in the DFR sample survey. In the sample survey, enjoyment derived from youth club activities figured only as a minor factor. Less than 5% of the DFR survey participants cited enjoyment as their motivation to belong to a club. It is possible that respondents omitted to mention enjoyment because they regarded enjoyment as a self-evident motivation. In the discussion sessions with YCP youth, both intrinsic and extrinsic satisfactions figured as dominant motivating factors. YCP youth emphasised their love of singing, dancing or sports as a major incentive to remain active in their clubs. At the same time the club and its activities were also seen as the vehicle for realising youthful aspirations of fame and success. The young people yearned to excel, to prove their talent, and to gain social recognition in their communities. In this sense all youth club members were potential winners. Further incentives were the need for fellowship, the opportunity to meet new people, keep fit and gain self-confidence. Some of the gospel singers stated that their club activities allowed them to express their missionary zeal. Singing was equated to preaching the gospel. Other youth simply wished to give people pleasure through their singing and dancing. In contrast to the DFR survey results, keeping out of trouble was an important motivator for both girls and boys. (2)

- Group cohesion
An additional ingredient emerged in the group discussions which had not been anticipated in the categorisation scheme provided for the sample survey. The quality of group cohesion figured both as an attractive force for joining a group and continued participation. A major source of pride and satisfaction was mutual respect of club members, a common sense of purpose and good communication. Youth praised the professionalism and dedication which fellow club members brought to their club activities. Earlier studies noted an inversion of values among black youth whose education had been disrupted during the political unrest. The ethic typically associated with work appeared to be transferred to the play situation. This anomaly was interpreted as the need to compensate for deficiencies in opportunities for advancement through regular educational and occupational channels (Møller, 1991:61).

Excerpts from the group interviews illustrate motivations to participate in youth club activities which refer to the quality of group cohesion.

"There is a lot of happiness in the group. When I get to the group I forget sorrows and problems. That is why I am always at practices because all the songs make me forget my problems" (female gospel singer).
"What I like in my group is that when we are together we are very serious, we are enjoying not playing" (emphasis added).

"The group is very progressive. When we come to practice, we get serious about our work. That's why I'm very proud of this group".

"We come from different backgrounds. That is why we have respect for each other".

Non-participation
DFR youth who were not members of clubs at the time of the survey cited preference “to remain uninvolved” as the major reason for not belonging to a club (cf Table 2). Other important disincentives included danger factors and commitments at work and in the home. No significant gender differences were observed. The literature cites time and cost factors as the major disincentives to participate in new activities. Noteworthy is that only 7% of DFR youth indicated that cost factors prevented them from joining a club.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason (* )</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preference to remain uninvolved</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work/school commitments</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dangerous to attend meetings</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dislike of organised activities</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household duties</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family disapproves</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dislike of club people</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost factors</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former club member</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*) Respondents gave multiple reasons. Spontaneous reasons were fitted to given categories
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The YCP youth reported that persons who lacked talent or were lazy would not be attracted to their clubs. Some club activities were socially less acceptable than others. The discussion group distinguished between leisure activities associated with country bumpkins, city slickers, and thugs. For example, some traditional dance forms were associated with a conservative lifestyle and might be less popular among some groups of urban youth. Soccer and *pansula* dance forms typically attracted youth who identified with an urban lifestyle. Although YCP youth did not volunteer this information, one can imagine that in the current political climate, participation in a club whose activities signal conservatism or radicalism represents a liability for youth living in areas controlled by the opposing factions.

**Key events in joining or forming groups**

The experiential model of activity adoption outlined in the literature review cites opportunity, knowledge, milieu and receptiveness factors as preconditions for adopting a leisure interest. The following picture of the participation process emerged from the accounts collected in the third round of research among YCP youth. In the case of joining clubs, potential joiners shared a love of song, dance or sport (receptiveness). Knowledge of existing groups which pursued these interests was a given factor because most operated as neighbourhood groups and performed in public. (3)

The key event in most instances was the decision by like-minded persons, members of the same family, neighbours, or schoolmates, to sing or play together. In the case of youth initiatives, the youth created their own leisure opportunities. New club members were recruited to existing clubs through the same personal networks. Recruitment figured as the key event in the accounts of joining existing groups. Milieu factors concerned the recruitment through friends and the positive support of parents and mentors. The pro-social objectives of clubs usually ensured positive support of family and friends. Conversely lack of support led to discontinuation of participation in club activities. Mthembu and Møller (1991:41) and the study of youth clubs in the Durban shack areas reported cases where the boyfriends of club members disrupted club meetings and forced their girls to drop out of club life. In response to a probe, the YCP youth indicated that soccer players, in particular, were seen to be at risk of failing at school because they were too preoccupied with their club activities. “*If ever they lose in soccer, they keep thinking about it, even in Standard 10*”. Concerned parents might disallow club membership if activities interfered with academic performance. The profiles of clubs at Time 3 indicated that soccer clubs met more often than other clubs, usually at least five times a week. In order to protect their members from failure in school, one of the newly formed gospel groups who had just joined the YCP programme at Time 3, stated that they scheduled their weekend meeting after Saturday school (4)
Profiles of YCP youth clubs

The 42 groups who were contacted at Time 1 for possible participation in the YCP project were mainly groups with specific interests in the performing arts or active sports. A further characteristic was that many of the groups were self-initiated by the members themselves to develop leisure interests. Assuming that structure and organisation would be dependent on activities and affiliations, the researchers divided the groups into four broad categories of youth clubs: Church groups, gospel and dance groups, soccer and other sports groups, and multi-interest groups (Mthembu & Møller, 1991:29). “Hybrids” were groups difficult to classify. Many of the church groups operated as social clubs and were involved in gospel singing, sports, and community service activities. The multi-interest groups were the secular equivalent of the church groups. At Time 1, multi-interest groups included a first aid group and a sewing group. With the exception of this sewing group, few groups at Time 1 were involved in income-earning activities for individual members. By Time 2, some of the groups operating in the shack areas which were not electrified, had taken up candle-making. At Time 3, the groups identified themselves as gospel, dance, soccer or sports groups, and church groups. Reported activities included gospel singing, church and community activities, playing soccer and netball, karate, pansula and Zulu dance (township and more traditional dance forms), drama and modelling.

• Aspirations

Earlier research results (T1 and T2) indicated that the majority of the youth clubs, an estimated three in four, were initiated by members and operated informally (Mthembu & Møller, 1991:36). The youth aspired to be famous stars and to appear on radio or television. Their clubs were named after their heroes on the football field or the stage. Fame and recognition were seen as the mark of success. Material success was viewed as an outcome and a means to success. Only groups with equipment such as musical instruments, amplifiers, footballs and uniforms thought they could compete effectively. Bringing enjoyment and excitement to the people with their public performances or preaching the gospel through singing were considered community services as well as expressions of personal leisure interests. Apparently viewpoints had not changed between the first and third round of research.

• Composition

At Time 1 about three in four clubs were composed of both male and female members. The ratio of mixed to single gender clubs was reduced to one in two at Time 3. It was observed that a few multi-interest mixed-gender groups split
between Time 1 and 3 to accommodate the diverse interests of men and women, a point that is picked up later. There appeared to be few age restrictions. An exception was a gospel group which split into two to cater for the needs of its older and younger members. Both the Harmony Voices and the Angels were still operating at Time 3.

Numbers ranged from a half dozen to two dozen members. Fledgling groups tended to be smaller, church and multi-interest groups larger. As gospel groups acquired the full range of voices their numbers grew. The size of the soccer clubs was consistently larger than average and equivalent to that of a soccer team.

- **Operational base**

Clubs operated in both the formal township housing areas and the shack areas. Initially, the YCP programme included more groups operating in the southern DFR where the snowball sampling procedure commenced, and fewer groups from the northern and western areas in the region. By Time 3, the spatial distribution of clubs affiliated to the YCP programme was more evenly distributed between northern and southern area clubs.

Clubs operated mainly as neighbourhood groups. Nevertheless, at Time 3 two-thirds of clubs had members who used public transport to attend meetings. The use of different types of venues depended on the size, type of activity and resources of the group. Few groups could afford to hire a hall and most operated from private homes and outbuildings. Public venues were considered dangerous in some areas. Others were vandalised, burnt down or closed to the public for security reasons during periods of political unrest. The only group which had derived some benefit from the unrest, was a newcomer to YCP in 1993 which met in the burnt-out shell of a private dwelling whose owners had fled the violence in the area.

- **Venues**

Church groups were more likely to have access to a church hall or school. The soccer groups usually met at a sports ground for practice. At Time 3 the sports groups indicated that they also met at private homes for meetings and exercise. Weekdays were more likely to be reserved for practice and administrative and planning meetings, weekends for sports meetings, competitions and public performances. Clubs reportedly met throughout the week in the afternoons and evenings and also during the day over weekends. Monday was the least popular meeting day, Friday the most popular.

- **Resources**

Most clubs required funds to pay for equipment such as uniforms, shoes, balls, musical instruments and transport to the venues where they performed as a group. At
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Time 3, the clubs reported that they drew on a wide range of incomes, including joining fees and club dues, public performances and soccer games, and organising fundraising events such as fashion shows and beauty contests. Only one club indicated that it had a sponsor but several clubs, mainly the sports and dance clubs, reported that their leaders paid their expenses. The first round of inquiry had showed that most youth clubs were keen to obtain parental approval of activities and often relied heavily upon adults as mentors and sponsors (Mthembu & Møller, 1991). At Time 3, public performances were cited as the main source of income in half of cases. Some groups organised their own public performances in the townships or participated in the Durban City Council project described earlier. The football teams organised a pool among themselves with the winning team taking all the stakes. The gospel and dance groups performed at weddings and parties. Singing at funerals was considered a community service with no charge. Reportedly, one of the gospel groups was formed at a funeral where a few young people were mourning. The youths stayed together to offer solace with their singing to the many families in their area who lost loved ones during the township unrest of the 1980s (Mthembu & Møller, 1991:32, Case study 3).

At Time 3 approximately two thirds of clubs operated with a committee. Almost all clubs claimed to have monies which were administered by a treasurer or office bearer in the club or in some instances by a sub-committee. However, only a minority of three clubs out of fifteen operated a bank or building society account. Most clubs kept a photo album or scrapbook.

Almost all groups involved in the third wave of research stated that they had participated in the talent day competitions organised by YCP during the past year. In contrast, only half had attended workshops. The communication structures of the groups are indicative of informality. At Time 3 communication with the YCP committee was mainly by personal visits and by telephone in about one third of cases.

- **Membership turnover**

The preoccupation of the YCP-affiliated youth with the survival of their clubs and the umbrella YCP committee prompted a special inquiry into the membership turnover of groups. An earlier analysis undertaken at Time 2 divided groups into those “dead” and “alive”, to use youth club jargon. Further distinctions applied to alive groups by the researchers referred to groups who had “suspended activities”, were “transformed” in terms of structure, composition or aims, and “particularly successful” clubs (Mthembu & Møller, 1991:42). The club profiles were compiled with the aim of identifying the salient characteristics of intact groups.

At Time 1, it was estimated that roughly equal numbers of groups had been operating less than one year, between two and three years, and between five and
nine years, respectively. The church and sports groups were among the longest operating groups. A tracer study of the 42 groups contacted at Time 1 showed that only 73% were still active at Time 2. At Time 3, 43% of the groups contacted originally were still active and 29% had ties to the YCP programme (cf Table 3). The average lifespan of the surviving groups at Time 3 was estimated to be five and a half years.

### TABLE 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of club</th>
<th>1988/9</th>
<th>1990/1</th>
<th>1993</th>
<th>YCP Affiliation(*)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T1</td>
<td>T2</td>
<td>T3</td>
<td>T3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gospel</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-interest</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hybrid</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Proportion of T1 clubs still active | 100% | 73% | 43% | 29% |

(*) Outcome based on outsider classification of clubs

The inquiry into membership turnover showed that the structures and identities of the informal groupings were constantly changing. The continual struggle for group cohesiveness was referred to in individual accounts of the process of forming or joining a youth club in the T3 research sessions. Excerpts from the round robins illustrate the frequent references to constant fragmentation and reformation of informal groups:

"The group fell apart. We continued, the remaining ones. Some came in, others went out".

An older female gospel singer from one of the original groups recalled: "There was conflict between the sons and us... We were insulted... After we split from the Challengers we went to record again as the Supreme Efforts. We did well and some of us got married, some of us went to teach in schools and it went down again. We started again in 1991 and we're still going strong. We're five girls".
One of the most successful mixed gospel gender groups at the YCP talent days which has also performed on the steps of the city hall has a history of constant turnover:

"... We had some problems with members. The female members left the group and only men were left. We tried to sing as boys. Another boy tried to get some girls. We had more problems with the new girls and they left again. As we went along we changed our name to Harmony Voices".

In the group research session participants quizzed each other about their club life. Following on from the set questions one interviewer immediately posed the survival question: "Don't you think that your group will fall apart?" The reply was: "No, in most cases teams split because of poor management and lack of cooperation among members". Tellingly the response referred not to dissolution but to fragmentation. Note the spontaneous reference to the skills required to prevent fragmentation. Both training in management and interpersonal relations skills featured prominently in the YCP education programme's to promote group solidarity.

Discussion

Group dynamics
The present and earlier studies suggest that group cohesion is considered both an attractive feature of club life and an ingredient of success for youth clubs. At Time 2 it was difficult to discern the exact reasons for the disintegration of groups. In some cases it seemed that members had simply lost interest in club activities. It was thought that some of the performing groups which met five times a week may have suffered from burnout (Mthembu & Møller, 1991:43). The life cycle of some clubs appeared to be linked to active leadership: club life suffered when leaders left the area or became preoccupied with other issues in life, usually following a change of occupational or marital status. These cases fit the notion of clubs playing a bridging role in the lives of young people as specified in the literature.

An earlier report put forward the supposition that informal youth clubs in the Durban region had formed to counter the violent atmosphere of the townships during the 1980s (Mthembu & Møller, 1991:32-33). It appears that not all clubs managed to withstand the political pressures in their neighbourhoods. It is estimated that the political violence resulted in the disintegration of at least four of the original groups. In most cases individual members rather than the clubs became victims of the violence. However, it was observed that following threats on the life of one club member or a fatal attack, fellow members often felt too discouraged to continue with their club activities.
The tracer study undertaken at Time 3 suggested that there was a cyclical pattern of growth and demise – at least among some types of youth clubs. The typical pattern of growth and decline appeared to be most visible among the small number of multi-interest groups. At Time 1, five groups were classified as multi-interest groups. At Time 2, it was observed that all of the multi-interest groups had transformed – the groups had changed their mix of activities or their structures. None survived intact, that is in their original structure, to Time 3.

Size appeared to be a critical factor for group cohesion and affiliation to the YCP support programme. The multi-interest groups were characterised by larger numbers. Either groups were large because they attracted youth with diverse interests, which is in itself an indication of successful operations. Alternatively, the larger clubs were forced to diversify their programme of activities to retain the support of their large and heterogeneous following.

Whichever explanation holds, it appears that the larger multi-interest groups experienced difficulties in maintaining their cohesiveness and tended to split into smaller groupings.

Two sets of findings illustrate the dynamics of larger groups. Firstly, it was observed that two multi-interest groups which had been rated very successful at Time 2 in terms of their activity record had split into smaller groups at Time 3. Noteworthy is that some of the splinter groups continued to participate in the YCP programme.

Secondly, it was observed that two large and successful gospel groups, Mighty Heroes of Faith and Challengers, remained intact but discontinued their association with the YCP programme between Time 2 and Time 3. It is assumed that the reason for non-participation was simply that these groups were no longer in need of the YCP support programme.

Taken together these findings suggest that multiple interests represent an additional “risk” factor over and above size while a single interest provides a basis for consolidation. Thus, while some large groups remained intact and “graduated” from the YCP support programme, other large groups, mainly multi-interest ones, produced splinter groups which were more vulnerable and required the resources of the YCP programme.

The YCP programme may have unwittingly assisted in the exchange of members and thereby in the process of transformation and demise of groups. The talent days promoted healthy competition between performing groups and contributed to better knowledge of individual clubs’ strengths and weaknesses. The more successful and attractive groups stood to gain members while others lost some of their members or were absorbed intact into more attractive clubs.

- Methodological notes on group dynamics

In hindsight, the research approach adopted for the tracer study was flawed. At the outset, individual clubs were regarded as the unit of analysis and each club was
identified by its given name. At Time 2 it was noted that some 8 clubs, almost 20%, had transformed their structure and some had also changed their names. Transformation involved shedding of less active members and troublemakers or breaking into splinter groups. In some cases clubs adopted new names as an integral part of transformation. At Time 3 half of the active groups were offshoots of their original groups and/or were operating under different names. At this point it became obvious that the tracer study was hampered by the fluid identity and structures of the groups.

In some cases the degree of transformation might have been exaggerated by the classification of groups from an outsider viewpoint at Time 1. For example, two groups classified as hybrids by the first author at Time 1, Harmony Voices and Converse, survived the five year review period intact. The first group sang gospel but was also engaged in community work. The second group, Converse, a mixed gender group, pursued activities as diverse as gospel singing and soccer. Although the groups still pursued the same mix of activities at Time 3, they both identified themselves as gospel groups in the self-administered T3 survey.

A further example of fluid identity, difficult to capture at discrete points in time, concerns one of the original church groups. By Time 3 the church group had produced splinter groups which joined the YCP programme in their own right. Two of the splinter clubs were football clubs (Phola and Zebra) with exclusively male membership. A third all-girl gospel group retained the identity of the mother church group in its given name although it listed gospel music as its sole activity in the self-administered survey. This splinter church group was one of the smallest group in the T3 survey with less than five members.

Fluid identities also served to confuse the exact classification of the age of a group. It is possible that insiders saw each transformation as the mark of a new beginning even if it did not result in a name change. The case of Cosmos, a club classified as a “hybrid” at Time 1, is a good example. One of the oldest clubs in the survey, Cosmos had originally been formed to keep youth off the streets in the 1970s. At T2 it had Shed its female members by way of solving group tensions. In response to the T3 self-administered survey, the current members indicated that the club had been operating for only four years. However, during the group discussion one member proudly cited the club’s illustrious pedigree and recalled its long history. The club formed to pursue pro-social goals but named itself after a famous and notorious street gang to enhance its prestige and attraction to rebellious youth.

To sum up, the conceptual flaw in the tracer study only became fully evident at Time 3 when the lack of consistency between club identity and activities posed problems of classification according to the system adopted at the outset of the study. Clearly the study was seeking to trace protean entities. The clue to the pattern
of transformation were the multi-interest groups and hybrids which showed more clearly the cycle of renewal. Name changes and the shedding of members according to gender were other clues. For research purposes the clubs were identified by their given names. However, according to questionnaire returns, half the groups which survived to Time 3 had changed their names. The lack of a clear-cut profile of informal groupings – even if they were subdivided into interest groups, was explained by the fact that the researchers were observing constantly changing entities. Only a snapshot of the club’s full development cycle was captured at each stage of the research. Therefore even the analytical division into five types of informal groups revealed few common characteristics within categories. The attempt to trace the groups by their names had proved a futile analytical exercise. The fact that the YCP committee, which kept meticulous minutes of its meetings, never bothered to compile a written list of participating clubs or keep files on members of its constituency, might have alerted the researchers to the difficulty of attempting to trace constantly changing club identities.

- **Group dynamics among informal church groups**

The transformation model of youth clubs explains the dominance of church youth clubs in South Africa. The church is a common reference group for a substantial proportion of South African youth. Twelve of the 42 YCP youth groups, or 29%, contacted at Time 1 were classified as church groups. Although no distinction was made between formal and informal groupings, the leisure survey referred to earlier found that 23% of Durban youth were members of church youth clubs compared to only 7% in non-church affiliated clubs.

Whereas the secular multi-interest groups were predestined to transformation, the church youth groups in the YCP programme were over-represented among the long-term survivors (cf Table 3). It was not uncommon for informal church groups to suspend activities for a number of years without loss of group identity. At Time 2 church youth groups were over-represented among the groups which had suspended activities. Given the ample resources of the mother organisation very little effort was required to revive a youth group. The church youth groups, which often looked to church ministers or adult officials for leadership enjoyed a built-in security by virtue of their church affiliation. With church affiliation went a venue, financial resources and an audience.

**The education role of YCP**

The discussion of group dynamics would not be complete without reference to youth-initiated interventions. The YCP education programme was born of the expressed need of the youth to belong to strong and cohesive groups. Initially the YCP education programme responded to requests from the youth for leadership
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Training and life skills training to promote group solidarity. Later the programme included assertiveness training for female members to solve the "girl" problems experienced in many clubs.

The educational thrust of the YCP programme aimed to strengthen clubs so that they in turn could fulfil their bridging function, that is, supply positive reference groups for youth during their formative years. This was achieved by providing training in management skills and democracy to the youth participating in the YCP committee and to its executive.

Leadership and life skills training was disseminated in snowball fashion. Training was first given to committee members, thereafter to club leaders and regular members. Trained youth also took turns in acting as facilitators in skills training sessions. In time, expert facilitators from other areas were replaced by local experts (Mthembu & Møller, 1991:38-39). These developments allowed for cost savings and greater self-reliance.

Noteworthy was the progression to greater youth involvement in the YCP committee after the university research project reached completion. The committee was restructured several times between 1990 and 1993 to allow for greater grassroots participation. However, due to practical problems of bringing together youth from throughout the DFR, the management function still rested mainly with the executive, not all of whom were attached to a club of their own.

In many ways the YCP committee operated in a fashion parallel to its constituent clubs. Its structure remained informal and its activity schedule depended largely on the drive of its leaders. The committee failed to secure a welfare number which would allow it to raise funds for its education programme. Although records were kept of meetings and regular evaluations were undertaken of its events, no formal records were kept of clubs affiliated to the programme. Informal contacts were maintained between the committee and the clubs through personal visits or telephone calls. The annual schedule of events was communicated to the clubs in this manner rather than in a newsletter or circular. The continuity of the YCP programme was largely dependent on the inputs of the coordinator who maintained contact between the core of YCP and peripheral clubs.

The informal structuring of the YCP committee and its member clubs might be regarded as both a strength and a weakness. During the politically turbulent 1980s formal club membership might have been a liability for participants. Informality and the lack of written records may have been seen as less threatening to youth in a context where affiliation to the wrong group often proved fatal. Furthermore, potential members may have been more attracted to clubs which operated with few strict rules and regulations and demanded no, or only small, fees. During one of the T3 research sessions, the youth noted that youth club activities were variously associated with rural-conservative and urban lifestyles. Other evidence not re-
viewed earlier indicated that friction between township and shack youth derived from differences in lifestyles which assumed political overtones in some instances.

As part of its education programme the YCP committee recommended that member clubs should operate with a committee. A mark of achievement of this education thrust is the high proportion of YCP clubs which reported a committee structure in the T3 survey. Other survey returns from Time 3 suggested that the education programme might need to be made more accessible and attractive to the current participants. Initially viewed as treats, the weekend education workshops appeared to have lost some of their popularity by Time 3. The participation rate in the year end talent day was substantially higher than in the weekend workshops. The benefits of the training weekends, which serve only intermediate objectives, such as group cohesion, may not be seen to compensate sufficiently for a break in regular club activities. In contrast, the talent day, which is advertised well in advance, may be seen as a major event to publicise and project the groups' primary aim of achieving fame and recognition.

Since its inception, the YCP committee had consistently described its role as a support service to youth clubs in the region: it aimed to provide encouragement to fledgling informal groups and training in management skills and fundraising to established groups. During the first two years of its operations the YCP programme could afford to provide transport for youth to attend its events. Later limited funding prevented continuation of this practice. A major problem for the YCP committee after the conclusion of the formal research and development project was the expectation that the YCP programme would provide financial incentives to participate in its education programme. A number of clubs involved in the discussion sessions at Time 3 inquired why YCP had failed to provide transport for talent day participants.

**Summary and Conclusions**

This paper set out to examine attractions of youth clubs, which are thought to promote "fine" youth, and to explore the role of the YCP education programme in enhancing the continued attractiveness of such groups.

Earlier research showed that the majority of the YCP youth groups were self-initiated and their operations informal. Youth saw their clubs as the vehicle to achieve fame and recognition for themselves and their peers. Teamwork and dedication were the ingredients of success. The current research identified the opportunity for personal skills development as one of the most important attractive features of youth clubs. Non-participants preferred to remain uninvolved, which may reflect the current political tensions in South African society. Noteworthy is that lack of time or money was not a major disincentive as was found to be the case in other studies of leisure participation.
The dynamics of group formation and transformation observed among the informal clubs in the Durban area are suggestive of the bridging function of youth clubs, i.e., assistance to adapt to adult life, cited in the literature. Membership turnover in youth clubs may reflect adolescent yearnings to explore different social contexts to expose their interests and talents and to meet new people (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1975: 96). Adolescent needs may explain the protean nature of informal clubs which are susceptible to fragmentation and integration. The study showed that informal groups emerge and disappear as needs for fellowship and shared interest arose. Even if youth clubs shut their operations altogether, the active members joined up with other youth clubs in the neighbourhood. That is, informal youth clubs may "die", to use the popular reference term, but their members gravitate to "alive" and active groups. Contrary to the researchers' initial viewpoint, the capacity for constant change and renewal might be judged as a strength rather than a weakness. The transformation process ensures that informal youth clubs match the needs of their youthful members as they grow and develop into adults in a rapidly changing environment.

In the South African case, youth clubs may assist in smoothing over emergent class distinctions and entrenched political divides which threaten emergent democracy. The quality of group cohesiveness was a particularly attractive force in informal clubs. Mutual respect and a sense of common purpose was cited as an important ingredient of solidarity and a source of pride. Youth club members reported that the YCP education programme had assisted them to learn to respect their peers regardless of social background differences for the sake of a common interest and purpose.

Although an evaluation of the success of the education programme is beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth noting that positive peer education may have strengthened democratic values of social tolerance and respect for peers. The study revealed that youth club members expect to progress through their leisure activities, a fact which may reflect on the poor education system for young black South Africans. The success of the YCP programme, which dispensed education in a leisure rather than a school context, may have been its appeal to youth who take their fun seriously. The YCP education programme was designed to equip young people with the skills to manage their human and material resources to ensure that clubs continued to meet the aspirations of their members. The YCP activity programme also provided a platform for healthy competition between groups to identify attractive groups. Attractive groups typically afforded a rich club life which was enhanced by good resources. The observation that some larger groups "graduated" from the YCP programme to operate independently may be seen as an indication of a success. By virtue of their capacity for transformation, it is predicted that pro-social informal youth clubs will continue to play an important role in providing positive guidance for youth in a democratic South Africa.
Footnotes

(1) Street committees were formed to fill the leadership vacuum in the townships resulting from political turmoil of the 1980s. Mainly youth served on the street committees.

(2) An independent study of 256 youth in two shack areas of the DFR conducted by the third author confirmed the above motivations. The high participation rate in youth clubs of 82% was most probably the result of recruiting subjects through clubs. Half the youth indicated that club membership improved their quality of life. In response to an open ended item, youth named opportunities to gain knowledge and develop talents as a major advantage. Other advantages included the need to share ideas, to meet friends and combat loneliness, to keep busy and out of trouble, earn pocket money, relax and get "recharged", and travel. The attraction of clubs which offer money-earning opportunities appears to be more pronounced among shack area youth.

(3) The knowledge factor was confirmed by a recent survey undertaken as part of a broader inquiry into the role of the performing arts in post-apartheid society. Survey participants were asked to name local talent in their communities. Several YCP-affiliated groups figured in the lists of nominations (May, 1993:20ff).

(4) In many urban areas extra-mural schooling is offered to township students on Saturdays to compensate for poor quality education in state schools.

References


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